1. Identify the stereotypes about the genders to which Barry refers.

2. Barry’s tone here is comic. How does his use of humor relate to his comparison of men and women? Does he refute stereotypes about the differences between men and women or confirm them?

3. Think of different kinds of behavior you’ve noticed people engaging in at holiday gatherings. Can you, as Barry does, make general points about people from your specific observations of those people?

4. While noting differences between the genders, Barry doesn’t consider why they exist. Research the various explanations that have been put forward for gender differences. Why do you believe some people believe these differences are inborn, or biological, and others think they are taught by our cultures? Which of these two views do you believe is correct?
1. Explain Didion’s title. Why does she call water “holy”?

2. In “Holy Water,” Didion writes, “A certain external reality remains, and resists interpretation” (par. 10). One of Didion’s strengths as an essayist is her ability to capture this reality. How does she do it? What different kinds of reality does she record, and how does she represent them? What are the effects of her amassing these representations?

3. Describe your own relationship to water. Then reflect on its connection to water conditions where you live. Do you think about this connection in your daily life? Should you? Why or why not?

4. “I know as well as the next person that there is considerable transcendent value in a river running wild and undammed, a river running free over granite,” Didion writes, “but I have also lived beneath such a river when it was running in flood, and gone without showers when it was running dry (par. 9). Consider Didion’s argument in the essay concerning the necessity of controlling water through technological means in light of arguments against dams and other such reroutings of water’s natural course. Should people live where water is so scarce? Consider this idea in larger terms: Should people live where nature is inhospitable because of scarcity or because of the danger of water-related catastrophes?
George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”
http://www.online-literature.com/orwell/887/

1. Why does Orwell shoot the elephant?

2. Orwell uses the anecdote of his shooting an elephant to illustrate his feelings about imperialism. What are those feelings, and how does the anecdote illustrate them?

3. What would you have done if you were in Orwell’s place? Why?

4. Research the historical situation out of which Orwell was writing. Though we are now said to be in a postcolonial age, situations like the one Orwell describes still exist in the world. Can you imagine a similar story being told from someone in today’s world? Where? Describe the situation and compare it to Orwell’s. Can the exact same story be told? How might it differ?
1. What does the cave stand for in Plato’s allegory? Make a list of the other elements in the allegory—chains, light, darkness, and so on—and explain what they represent.

2. Plato compares a number of things in this essay—the material world to the world of ideas, the life of the mind to the work of governing, gold and silver to virtue and wisdom. How does he use his comparisons to make his arguments?

3. Though George Orwell, in “Shooting an Elephant,” is a different kind of leader than the rulers in Plato’s allegory, he is in a position of authority. Do you think there are points of connection between the two essays in this area? Can you consider Orwell’s reflection on his actions, and the tangle of motivations behind them, in light of Plato’s discussion of the potentially conflicting motivations of rulers?

4. Plato argues that in working public affairs and working for one’s own private advantage cannot mix. How might contemporary politics bear out this assertion or contradict it?

5. In “The Allegory of the Cave” legislators are described as aiming not “at making any one class in the State happy above the rest; the happiness was to be in the whole state (par. 59). Consider contemporary politics in this statement. In what ways do you find the aim here ascribed to legislators to be shared by contemporary elected officials? In what ways do you not?
1. The kind of language-learning approach described in this essay is called “immersion.” Explain the metaphor. Is it appropriate? What are its implications?

2. Describe the way in which Sedaris presents the dialogue of the students as they attempt to speak French. What effect does this achieve?

3. In telling his story, Sedaris does not present himself as entirely heroic—he is not afraid to appear foolish. George Orwell, in “Shooting an Elephant,” also chooses not to portray himself as flawless. Compare the effects of these choices and the motivations of the writers for making them.

4. Write about a time when you encountered a teacher or other authority figure with whom you had a problem. Did the friction make you want to give up or to work harder, either to please them or show them what you could do?